

Madison revisited by 'Spirit' of flight

By Richard W. Jaeger
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That memorable day 50 years ago when "Lucky Lindy" buzzed his Spirit of St. Louis over the Capitol Square and landed at the old Royal Airport south of the present Beltline was re-enacted Saturday. **AUG 7 - 1977**

As smiling Jimmy Leeward stepped from the sleek, silver bird with its churning propeller and waved to the cheering crowd of 1,500 people at the Dane County Regional Airport Saturday morning, there were flashes of what that first visit by the famous Charles Lindbergh must have been like.

Only difference

Probably the only real difference from that Aug. 22, 1927, visit was that the latest landing of the Spirit was made under the watchful eye of helicopter and jet airplane traffic.

Wisconsin and Madison were familiar places to Lindbergh, who attended the University of Wisconsin in his early years.

The plane on display Saturday afternoon at the ramp by the old National Guard hangar and Four Lakes Aviation terminal near Highway 51 is a copy of the original Spirit of St. Louis kept at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

The replica is one of five built in Franklin, a suburb of Milwaukee, for the Experimental Aircraft Assn. (EAA) and is part of its traveling "living" museum.

104 cities

The new Spirit will visit 104 cities across the country to mark the 50th anniversary of Lindbergh's famous flight across the Atlantic in May of 1927. Madison was the 35th stop in the tour which is expected to wind up in mid-October.

Leaving the Dane County airport at 8:30 a.m. today, the Spirit will make a

two-hour stop in LaCrosse before continuing on to Minneapolis and Little Falls, Minn., Lindbergh's hometown.

As young and old mingled about on the airport ramp to catch a glimpse or snap a picture of the huge single-engine plane, representatives of EAA told the history of Lindbergh's flight and how the original airplane and the replica differed.

Leeward, who wore a tan flight uniform authentic to the one worn by Lindy, detailed the 1977 trip of the Spirit, which is attempting to retrace Lindbergh's 48-state visit in 1927.

Not unlike the problems faced on Lindbergh's flight from New York to Paris, the modern-day Spirit had its share of mechanical mixups.

A bolt on one of the plane's engine exhaust stacks broke as it buzzed the State Capitol building Saturday morning, Leeward said.

The malfunction forced the plane to make a quick landing to round up a spare part.

Parts rescue

Bill Amundsen of Stoughton, an enthusiast of old-time airplanes, came to the rescue with a spare part from one of the planes he is rebuilding.

"I was a bit worried the stack would spin off and go through the wing or tail," Leeward told the attentive crowd. "My real worry was that it would fall off and hit someone, but it is all right now."

For most people in Saturday's noisy, excited crowd, their only view of Lindbergh and the plane in which he made his historic trans-Atlantic flight came through old black and white newsreels or by seeing actor Jimmy Stewart play the famous pilot in the movies a few years back.

However, there were some who saw the real man and the real airplane back in 1927.

"I remember that day," chuckled Madison Postmaster John Whitmore. "I stood along East Washington Ave.